



## Integrated Park Improvement and Natural Resources

### Introduction

The National Park Service has undertaken a major pilot planning effort at Shenandoah that is aimed at improving the condition of park facilities as well as natural and cultural resources in a cohesive and cost effective manner. This effort is being called "Integrated Park Improvement".

Through the course of scoping discussions, park staff members and planners arrived at the conclusion that it was most appropriate to focus the pilot effort on the Big Meadows and Rapidan Camp areas. These areas include many facilities and pose difficult and interesting challenges related to the protection of natural and cultural resources.

As originally conceived, the Integrated Park Improvement program was driven by backlog maintenance related to facilities and infrastructure. Discussions have now shifted to include consideration of natural resources and non-facility cultural resources. This was an important shift related to making the approach to park conditions all encompassing and related to the fact that many decisions regarding park facilities should be made in the context of natural and cultural resource considerations.

As of May 2010, park staff members and planners are roughly six months into planning activities.

### Management Needs

A number of years ago the National Park Service identified the fact that an enormous backlog of needs related to infrastructure and facilities exists throughout the park system. Shenandoah's facilities constitute a portion of that backlog. The Service response to correcting this situation has been to propose and fund individual projects that are directed at a single building, a single utility system, or sometimes, at natural groupings of buildings, building components, or systems (roofs on several buildings, painting of several buildings). This strategy often meant that reduction of the backlog would take years and that only partial rehabilitations were occurring.

Furthermore, backlog needs related to facilities and infrastructure were identified independently from natural and cultural resource needs (except where facilities were historic structures). Concurrently natural and cultural resource needs were identified independently from facility or infrastructure needs. Opportunities for coordination and collaboration were being overlooked.

### Current Procedures

Within the parameters of the Integrated Park Improvement (IPI) program, all disciplines within the park are brought together and projects are being considered within a common geographic area. This process is facilitating communications and idea sharing. The process also seems to be opening opportunities for consideration of more progressive thinking and better articulation of conditions that are being sought in the long run.

Staff members from the Denver Service Center are working with an interdisciplinary team of park employees on this effort. As of May 2010, most effort has been focused on determining the specific projects that will be embraced within the umbrella of IPI and on developing a firm understanding amongst the planning staff of facility and resource conditions within the Big Meadows and Rapidan Camp area.

Future steps will include development of implementation scenarios, preparation of compliance, decision-making, project funding, and finally implementation.

This pilot effort provides a unique opportunity to advance the preservation of natural resources. As indicated above, simply engaging in a conversation about what needs to be done to improve natural resource conditions (removal of exotic plants, restoration of wetlands, etc.) at the same time that refurbishing concessioner facilities or repaving park roads is being discussed, is of great value. Concurrent discussions allow advance consideration and planning for exotic plant invasion prevention, plant salvage, coordinated restoration efforts, erosion and sediment control, and so forth. Accomplishing all of the work concurrently produces a much better result for the visitor and for long-term protection of park resources. The planning effort also allows for discussions about natural resource preservation that is directly related to facilities. For instance, groundwater protection is extremely important in the Big Meadows area thus consideration of water conservation measures should become an element of facility rehabilitation. Other examples could be cited.

